DPI PROGRAMME Update

UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

UN Information Centres newsletter

IN THIS ISSUE

UN50 and UNICs 2-3

From the Field 4

General Assembly.....5

UNAIDS.....6

Habitat II.....7

UPCOMING EVENTS

1996

15 January-2 February
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

22 January-29 March
Conference on Disarmament, Geneva

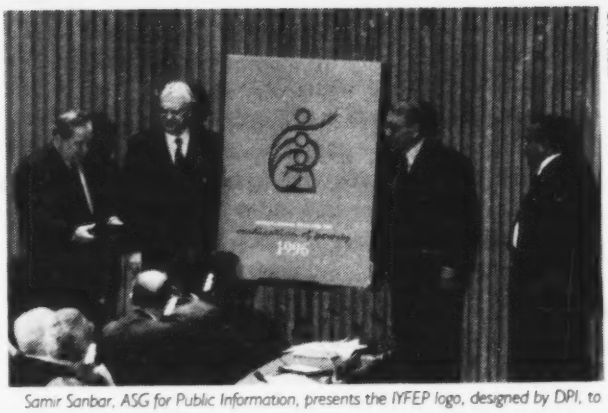
29 January-2 February
Committee on NGOs

29 January-7 February
Commission on Social Development

5-16 February
Third Preparatory Committee Meeting for Habitat II

31 December 1995

UN LAUNCHES INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY



UN Photo

Samir Sanbar, ASG for Public Information, presents the IYFEP logo, designed by DPI, to Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, GA President Diogo Freitas do Amaral, and Nitin Desai, USG for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali launched the 1996 International Year for the Eradication of Poverty at Headquarters on 18 December, emphasizing the ethical, social, political and economic obligation to end poverty.

Illustrating the severity of the problem, he said that more than 1.3 billion people were struggling to survive on less than one dollar per day, and some one billion persons lacked access to basic needs like safe water and sanitation.

The Secretary-General said that allowing poverty to persist "is not only incompatible with social harmony and a durable political order, but morally wrong". It was also a major cause of violent crime and ethnic clashes; denied the growth of democracy; and created inefficient economies by allowing assets to be wasted.

According to the Secretary-General, poverty alleviation was a global concern for three reasons: it was pervasive; it was a human imperative obliging action regardless of where it occurred; and the displacement of people, the spread of conflict and disease, and the consequences of social stress were transnational.

Recalling pledges made at the recent continuum of UN world conferences, he said these global commitments should be integrated into national plans, strategies, and programmes. Specific policies must be defined at both the national and local levels, and there should not be preconceptions. "National strategies must reflect national conditions and priorities", he emphasized. He also called upon policy makers to address the feminization of poverty--some two-thirds of the world's poor are women.

The UN has taken significant steps towards the eradication of poverty. Commitments made at the UN World Summit for Social Development, in March 1995, required countries to set a target date for ending extreme poverty. In addition, the Organization has invested 80 per cent of its budget in activities directly related to improving the economic and social conditions of peoples' lives.

The Secretary-General welcomed UNDP's decision to make poverty eradication its overriding priority and added that active inter-agency coordination would be essential to enable the UN system to support integrated national strategies for poverty eradication. Three task forces had been set up for this purpose, on: the enabling environment, chaired initially by the World Bank; basic services, chaired by UNFPA; and sustainable livelihoods and employment, chaired by ILO.

"To make a real impact", he said,"we have to allocate more resources for poverty alleviation". He urged Governments to: give priority to income- and employment-generating programmes targeting the poor; redeploy resources from accounts such as arms expenditures; and increase aid. To those people living in poverty he sent this message: "We ask you to tell us how we can work to meet your aspirations; not for you, but with you" **(SG/SM/5853)**.

The 1995 International Year for Tolerance coincided with the UN's Fiftieth Anniversary. Tolerance is among the concepts embodied in the principles of the UN Charter. We are committed, in the words of General Assembly President Diogo Freitas do Amaral, to creating a climate favorable to tolerance through construction of democratic institutions and the curbing of acts of intolerance, violence, discrimination and exclusion **(GA/9005)**. Throughout the year, UNICs organized seminars, special events and stimulated the media with thought-provoking articles on diversity and acceptance.

The theme of tolerance has also been central in the preparation of UN50 activities and information materials. **UNIC Rabat** undertook a novel initiative by producing a series of diskettes in French containing texts of major speeches by the Secretary-General, including one on tolerance; the Declaration for Human Rights; and action plans of major UN conferences. The diskettes were distributed in attractive blue and gold packaging bearing the UN50 logo.

UN Day

Photo: Bouda Jean

The Mayor of Ouagadougou and UNIC Director inaugurate the UN Plaza.

Reports on UN Day activities continue to reach ICS. **UNIC Ouagadougou**, together with the Mayor of Ouagadougou, inaugurated the UN plaza by exchanging flags to mark the Day. In cooperation with the UN50 National Committee, UNIC also organized an evening of music, art and a wide assortment of international cuisine.

UNIC Lima co-organized commemorative ceremonies at the UN Plaza and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the Congress payed tribute to the UN at a special plenary session by awarding the Organization with the Republic of Peru Congressional Medal of Honour.

UNIC Nairobi participated in a UN Day parade that was followed by a series of cultural events, including poetry readings, traditional dances and singing. **UNIC Brussels** reports that a special UN50 concert was held in honour of the Day. Later in the month, the OIC participated in a UN50 colloquium addressing the future of the Organization. **UNIC Mexico** observed the Day with the launch of *The United Nations in Mexico*, a publication outlining the activities of the UN system in that country.

Sports

Sports has been a popular vehicle for involving the public in UN50 activities this year. Both **UNIC Lima** and **UNIC Ouagadougou** organized bicycle tours, with young and old alike participating. Other athletic enthusiasts competed on the soccer field. **UNIC Lagos** held a three-week "peace walk" from Lagos to Abidjan, and a boat regatta show. These types of events enabled UNICs to extend their outreach to the sports media, resulting in positive news coverage.

Exhibits

Centres have had great success in attracting the public to a variety of exhibits held in connection with UN50. **UNIC Rabat** inaugurated an exhibit highlighting the UN system activities in Morocco, for which it prepared a summary of the Secretary-General's *1995 Report on the Work of the Organization* and a booklet on UN programmes in the country. **UNIC Lima** recently mounted three separate exhibits showcasing UN activities over the past 50 years.

Youth

UNICs have redoubled their efforts to involve youth in UN50. **UNIC Lagos**, together with UNICEF and UNESCO, organized a children's concert entitled "We the Children of the United Nations...United for a Better World". UN priority issues were presented in a lively and entertaining way to some 600 children. At the initiative of **UNIC Harare**, one of Zimbabwe's most popular musicians, Oliver Mtukudzi, composed a song based on UN achievements and gave a performance to an audience of more than 4,000.

Schools around the world have participated in essay, poetry, drawing and music competitions organized by the Centres. Recently in Indonesia, **UNIC Jakarta** and the Lions Club International sponsored a high school student essay contest on the "potentially negative impact of globalization". In Trinidad and Tobago, **UNIC Port of Spain**, together with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the UN50 National Committee, held a Model UN Assembly in connection with the Tenth Anniversary of International Youth Year, the International Year for Tolerance and UN50. UNIC staff also helped to familiarize participants with issues on the UN agenda and developed promotional materials for the event.

Photo: UNIC Port of Spain

Model UN delegates in Trinidad and Tobago adopt resolutions on tolerance and youth .

UNIC Buenos Aires also organized a Model UN Assembly, held in cooperation with the NGO "Conciencia". Some 430 children from 76 public and private schools participated, debating issues such as poverty, the situation in the former Yugoslavia and reform of the UN Security Council.

UNICs are also developing a loyal following amongst students at all levels. Several youths were eager to offer their services to **UNIC Harare** over the Christmas holidays, after viewing a UN in Action programme on the suffering in Rwanda. In addition, **UNIC Lima** has initiated a project entitled "Friends of the UN School Club", for secondary school students. Through club membership, students will be able to gain a deeper knowledge of the UN by organizing activities that exemplify the goals and ideals of the Organization. The local press, such as *El Comercio*, *Expreso* and *La Republica*, have been covering the club's activities.

Seminars

UNIC Mexico conducted a seminar for the local UN depository libraries on UN information materials. Included in the program was an overview of UN principal bodies and functions and related documentation. **UNIC Athens** recently participated in two conferences. The OIC addressed the opening day session of a two-day conference on "The UN in a Changing World" , organized by the Greek Institute for International Law and International Relations. At the Fifth Annual International Symposium of the Greek Association for the Atlantic and European Cooperation, the OIC served as a panelist in a discussion on "International Relations and the Issues of Security in the Balkans and the Mediterranean". Participants included diplomats and high-ranking military officers.

Publications

UNIS Bangkok prepared a comprehensive backgrounder on ESCAP's *1995 State of the Environment Report*, in which it was noted that the region's population figure, some 3.3 billion, will double in just 44 years if growth continued at the current rate. **UNIC New Delhi** published an informative article on poverty in its November newsletter, in time for the launch of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty. **UNIC Buenos Aires** sponsored a book entitled *Manana Siempre Es Tarde*, a collection of photos depicting children victims of war around the world. Also, the Municipality of Otan issued a resolution of thanks to **UNIC Manila** for providing it with a wide variety of UN publications and information materials.

Special Events

UNIC Nairobi reports that the "UN Road Show", a travelling caravan of artists, have performed throughout Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to the delight of audiences in those countries. In addition, **UNIC Colombo** reports that the mobile "UN50 Train Exhibition", that has been travelling for some three months, has received significant press coverage as well as the Secretary-General's UN Day message.

Photo: UNIC Lima

Some 2,000 people participated in UNIC Lima's bicycle tour for peace.

Centres have initiated a variety of events to commemorate local traditions and UN International Days this past month. **UNIC Yangon** mounted a UN publications exhibit at the Myanmar Sarsodaw Book Fair. Because "Sarsodaw" means a great literary person, the Ministry of Information called for a literary event to be held in every town, providing UNIC an opportunity to increase its outreach efforts.

The Director of **UNIC Tehran** delivered the keynote address on International Day of Disabled Persons, 3 December, at an event organized by Ra'ad, an advocacy group for disabled persons. The Secretary-General's statement was translated into Farsi for the event.

UNIC Lima and the UNDP field office commemorated International Volunteer Day, 5 December, with a round-table discussion entitled "Peruvians Serving the World". The event brought together those Peruvians who have worked in recent years as UN volunteers in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Mozambique and Rwanda.

On Human Rights Day,10 December, **UNIC Tokyo** co-organized an exhibit of children's paintings with the Metropolitan Government and World Gratitude, Inc. More than 1,500 people visited the week-long exhibition. **UNIC Athens** participated in two seminars: one entitled "Human rights in a changing world"; and the other on "The contribution of the UN in the promotion of Human Rights". **UNIC Buenos Aires** received an award from the University of San Luis for its dedication to the promotion of human rights.

WORLD LEADERS SUGGEST CHANGE

More than 185 world leaders attended the General Assembly's Special Commemorative Session, held from 22 to 24 October in observance of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the UN. While a wide range of statements were made, their proposals for the future focused on four key areas: preventive diplomacy and peace-keeping; international security and human rights; economic and social development issues and UN reform.

Several Member States suggested that preventive diplomacy efforts, such as analyses of early-warning information and intervention, should be strengthened. When preventive diplomacy fails, peace-keeping operations become a possibility. However, speakers insisted on limiting the number of missions to those that are practical and politically feasible. For some, an independent and well-qualified person could be entrusted to make recommendations to the Security Council. For others, Security Council procedures should be closely examined and clarified.

In the realm of international security and human rights, speakers called for the formulation of an agenda for democracy and tolerance to complement *An Agenda for Peace* and a special session of the General Assembly to study terrorism. In addition, speakers encouraged the enhancement of communication with regional organizations and closer cooperation on human rights issues.

Many speakers expressed the desire to see the UN place economic and social development issues at the centre of its activities, ensuring that there is a balance between resources devoted to them and peace-keeping. It was also suggested that a UN Council for Economic Security be created, calling on Member States to allocate 0.7 per cent of their GNP for international development assistance.

Most speakers agreed that the United Nations should be reformed by: increasing the membership of the Security Council to allow for more balanced representation, eliminating duplication and increasing efficiency in the UN system, and convening a special session of the General Assembly to resolve these issues by September 1996 -- a formidable challenge **(A/50/PV. 35-40)**.

GA ADOPTS INFORMATION AGENDA

The General Assembly, on 6 December, adopted two resolutions regarding information in the service of humanity and UN public information policies. It also decided to increase the membership of the Committee on Information to 89 to include the Democratic People's Republic of Korea **(GA/9026)**.

On information in the service of humanity, the Assembly urged States and organizations, in the context of what has been termed "a new world information and communications order", to ensure the diversity of media sources and their free access to information. To this end, States were asked to increase assistance to developing countries to improve their communications capabilities and to safeguard journalists working in their countries.

By resolution on United Nations public information policies and activities, the Assembly called for the involvement of DPI at the planning stage of future peace-keeping and other field missions. It also decided to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as the main body mandated to make recommendations on DPI's work.

Regarding publications, the Assembly called for the early resumption of *Development Forum*, or an alternative system-wide publication. DPI was asked to ensure that its publications fulfilled an identifiable need, avoided duplication and were produced cost-effectively. In addition, DPI was asked, among other things, to continue disseminating press releases in English and French; and to continue cooperation with Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine to establish and implement information activities for the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Reaffirming the important role UNICs played in disseminating information about the Organization's activities, the Assembly encouraged the integration of UNICs with UNDP field offices whenever feasible, without adversely affecting their information functions and autonomy. The Assembly welcomed the establishment, within existing resources, of information components in Warsaw and Bonn. It also noted the reactivation and enhancement of Centres in Bujumbura, Dar es Salaam, Dhaka and Tehran, as well as requests for opening UNICs in Bulgaria, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti and Slovakia.

GA PRESIDENT TALKS REFORM

Professor Diogo Freitas do Amaral, General Assembly President, discussed efforts to reform the Organization in a 9 November World Chronicle interview with UN correspondents Rob Watson of the BBC; Ricardo Alday of the Mexican News Agency and Michael Littlejohns as moderator.

Underscoring the level of support for and commitment to preserving the UN, the Assembly President said that world leaders still believe there is no alternative to the UN, although many have called for reform.

The next important step for the General Assembly, he said, will be developing a blueprint for UN reform by the end of its current session. To that end, five working groups have been set up, on: Agenda for Peace; Agenda for Development; the Security Council; the UN's financial situation; and strengthening and revitalizing the Organization. His strategy is to face the different tasks of these working groups as one--reform of the UN, resulting in a creative synthesis of proposals already put forth. It will most likely be the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session to draft the legal texts necessary to effect the changes, the Assembly President added.

Although reluctant to identify areas of duplication within the UN, the Assembly President said that he would be in favour of reducing the number of organs, agencies, etc., adding that it also may be necessary to augment expenditures in some cases to achieve efficiency. He feels strongly that countries adversely affected by a particular reform measure should not be able to veto the action and that decisions should be made by a two-thirds majority, rather than unanimously.

Reforming of the Security Council should be done in two phases, he said. First, the number of permanent and non-permanent members should be determined and membership criteria should be established. Only then should the decision of which countries to appoint be made, by secret ballot. "We should not mix the two", he said, "because if we do, we will never find a solution". He also suggested that membership should be limited to no more than 25 Member States for the Council to remain workable and efficient.

UN INTENSIFIES ITS FIGHT AGAINST AIDS

The UN has consolidated resources and brought together six agencies to wage war against the spread of HIV infection and curb the suffering caused by AIDS. This pioneering venture, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), is cosponsored by UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank. The programme becomes officially operational on 1 January 1996 and aims to strengthen and streamline action by the co-sponsors and other UN bodies in support of national responses to HIV and AIDS.

In recognition of the 1995 UN International Year of Tolerance, the theme "Shared Rights, Shared Responsibilities" was chosen to mark World AIDS Day, observed on 1 December. People have the right to be able to avoid infection and the right to health care and treatment without discrimination, maintains UNAIDS. But, they also have the responsibility to protect themselves and others from becoming infected.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali stressed, at a panel discussion organized by DPI and WHO at Headquarters on the Day, that the UN must view social development issues with the same sense of responsibility and urgency as political and security commitments. "UNAIDS is the logical outcome of the search for partnership in the fight against AIDS; it is a sharing of responsibilities within the international system", he said **(SG/SM/5829)**.

The reality of AIDS is devastating. More than 6,000 people are infected with HIV daily, estimates WHO. Out of the 20 million people infected since the epidemic began in the late 1970s, 4.5 million have developed AIDS, four million of whom have died.

Today, 90 per cent of all people living with AIDS are in developing countries. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the most affected part of the world, but Asia may soon overtake Africa as the region with the greatest number of new infections. Asia already suffers more AIDS cases a year than North America, and more than twice as many as Western Europe.

The spread of the virus is fueled by poverty, the inferior status of women and other societal factors. The poor have limited access to health care and AIDS education. In some regions, HIV is spread by people seeking refuge from conflict. Drug use, rising unemployment, lack of treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and inadequate blood safety practices are all contributing factors.

Estimated distribution of HIV-infected adults alive as of mid-1995

Source: WHO - Global Programme on AIDS

Women are the most vulnerable. In some cultures, it is often impossible for women to insist on protecting themselves through mutual fidelity or condom use. About one-third of babies born to HIV-infected mothers become infected themselves, according to WHO.

Among the hardest hit are young people. In some countries, 60 per cent of all new HIV infections are among 15-24 year olds. However, research shows that sex education contributes to the adoption of safer sexual practices.

UNAIDS will draw on practical experience gained worldwide to develop sound policies and strategies for prevention and care. The programme also provides technical support. Emphasizing the importance of protecting the human rights of persons with HIV/AIDS, Executive Director Peter Piot said, "Advocacy is not just an academic exercise in altruism". UNAIDS is based in Geneva: Tel. 41-22-791-2111; Fax 41-22-791-4880 ***(Working Together Towards a Safer World)***.

WHY A CONFERENCE ON CITIES?

Cities around the world are in distress. Rapidly increasing world population and migration are leading to congestion, shortage of adequate housing, poverty, declining infrastructure and poor city management. As cities grow, they usurp valuable land and water resources. The UN will address these issues when it convenes the Second World Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) to take place in Istanbul, Turkey, from 3 to 14 June 1996. Conference themes are "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world".

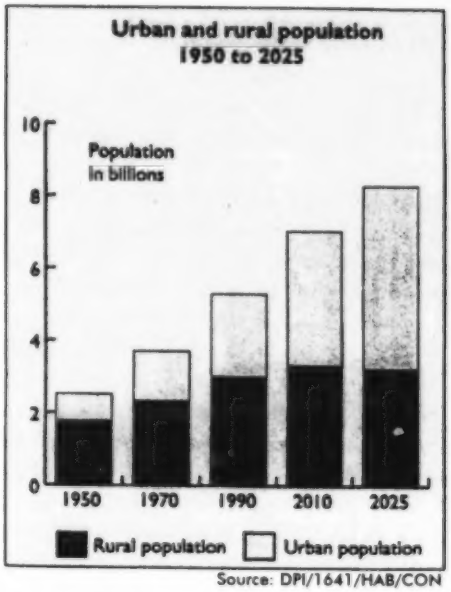
Habitat I, held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976, identified the need to include human settlements in the international development agenda. It also led to the establishment of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNHCS or Habitat) in 1978. Habitat helps governments improve the development and management of human settlements by providing technical advice, applied research and training.

The Secretary-General of Habitat II, Dr. Wally N'Dow, at a press conference at Headquarters on 14 November, said: "The world is heading for an urban future and people are not adequately prepared. The goal of Habitat II is to make the world's villages and cities less dysfunctional and more liveable".

Outlining the expectations of Habitat II, Dr. N'Dow said one goal was to raise awareness of the critical role shelter had to play in improving the human condition. Habitat estimates that at least 600 million people in the cities of developing countries are living in shelters that are life- or health-threatening. After food, housing is the largest expense for a poor family: approximately 33 per cent of its monthly budget worldwide **(DPI/1730/HAB/CON)**.

A second goal concerned the formulation of strategies to finance housing. According to Habitat, 99 per cent of investment in cities is generated domestically. To mobilize these resources, local authorities need to develop a common sense of purpose, understanding of the problems, as well as a sense of ownership in the decision-making process **(Countdown to Istanbul, No.2)**.

A third goal was the identification of solutions to today's shelter and urban problems. Habitat has



Source: DPI/1641/HAB/CON

taken an innovative approach towards this end by convening the International Conference on Best Practices in Improving Living Environments, held from 19 to 22 November in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Twenty-five case studies of the "Best Urban Practices", ranging from innovative waste disposal systems to effective poverty reduction programmes, from around the world were reviewed and will be presented at Habitat II **(HAB/101)**. Habitat hopes to establish a database of 500 "best practices" in time for the June Conference. This database will be available on CD-Rom and the Internet **(HAB/95/54)**.

A fourth goal of Habitat II was the creation of national indicators on such vital issues as housing and water and to develop a standardized body of information for measuring progress, ensuring that the shelter needs of women are carefully considered.

The key to achieving these goals is the promotion of partnership and local action, said Dr. N'Dow. Conference Deputy Secretary-General Jorge Wilheim agreed in a June World Chronicle Interview. "The love of the population for their cities makes it easier to be innovative" he said. The urban development agenda must consist of an integrated effort to combat poverty, improve governance, manage local environments and allow for more equitable access to land, housing, jobs, finance and shelter.

DPI/UNESCO MEDIA SEMINAR

A seminar on promoting independent and pluralistic Arab media is scheduled to take place in Sana'a, Yemen, from 7-11 January 1996. The seminar, which will be opened by Assistant Secretary-General Samir Sanbar on behalf of the Secretary-General, is the fourth in a series launched in 1991 by DPI and UNESCO: the seminar for Africa was held in Windhoek, Namibia (1991); for Asia, in Almaty, Kazakstan (1992) and for Latin America, in Santiago, Chile (1994). The Sana'a seminar will seek to promote a dialogue on freedom of expression, independence and pluralism of the media in the Arab countries, taking into account the particular regional, social, cultural and political situations, and to formulate practical proposals to achieve greater independence and pluralism in the Arab media. Seminar themes include: the situation of the media in the Arab world; public service media; the legal, cultural and political framework for a free and pluralistic media; the question of censorship and the training of media professionals.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A number of staffing changes have occurred in ICS:

Joe Sills, Spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, will take up his duties as Director of UNIC Washington on 1 January 1996.

Mahmoud El-Said, UN Representative in Azerbaijan, has been transferred to DPA at Headquarters.

Paul Kavanagh, Senior Political Adviser to the UN Operation in Cyprus, has been appointed as the new Director of UNIC Tokyo.

Vladimir Polyakov, Director of UNIC Accra, has been reassigned to the position of DPI Representative in Kazakstan.

Jan Fischer, ICS Information Officer, has been assigned to UNIC Sydney as Officer-in-Charge.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Agreement on High Seas Fishing (DPI/SD/1746; E/F/S)

Basic Facts (DPI/1580;E)

International Year for the Eradication of Poverty brochure (DPI/1736/POV;E/F)

NGOs and the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI/1438/Rev.1;E)

Notes for Speakers: The Advancement of Women (DPI/1674/WOM/CON;F)

YEAR IN REVIEW

Using rare archival footage, the UN has produced a video highlighting the goals set in San Francisco in 1945 and linking them with the enhanced role of the UN today. Available in A/C/E/F/R/S.

UN IN ACTION

The following videos have been produced:

- **Children Suffer Most in Afghanistan's Civil War** No. 422, Dur. 3'40"
- **Locust Plague Threatens the Bread Basket of Afghanistan** No. 423, Dur. 2'44"
- **Juvenile Offenders in France get a Second Chance** No. 424, Dur. 3'19"

WORLD WOMEN TODAY EXHIBIT

A photo exhibition based on the book *World Women Today*, published by the Xinhua News Agency, opened on 7 December for one week of showing at UN Headquarters. Co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of China and DPI, the exhibit includes photographs from the four UN conferences on women held in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). The photographs depict women in different parts of the world making political, economic, social and cultural contributions.

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